

# Human Resources (HR) Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) System Tutorial Script 2020-21 Data Collection Cycle

This tutorial provides an overview of the 2018 Standard Occupational Classification system.

The Standard Occupational Classification system, or SOC (pronounced “sock”), is designed to reflect the current occupational structure of the United States. It is used by Federal statistical agencies to classify workers and jobs into occupational categories for the purpose of collecting, calculating, analyzing, or disseminating data. The occupational categories in the IPEDS HR component were changed in 2012-13 to better align with the SOC system.

The SOC is a tiered occupational classification system with four levels: major group, minor group, broad occupation, and detailed occupation. The 23 major groups are broken down into 98 minor groups, followed by 459 broad occupations, and finally 867 detailed occupations.

For example, the detailed occupation of “Education Administrators, Postsecondary” flows down from the major group “Management Occupations.” Each detailed SOC occupation has a unique title, code, and definition.

The six-digit SOC codes help in identifying occupational levels. The first two digits correspond to the major group, the third digit indicates the minor group, the fourth and fifth digits indicate the broad occupation, and the sixth digit corresponds to the detailed occupation. IPEDS does not require institutions to manually code and report all occupations at the detailed SOC level. However, while coding at the 6-digit level is not required, it can make categorization more precise and also provides supporting documentation if there are questions about why a given job was classified in a specific IPEDS category.

SOC definitions only exist at the detailed level and begin with the duties all workers in the occupation perform. The definitions do not attempt to describe all aspects of an occupation, but the first sentence describes the duties that all workers must perform. Some definitions may also have special statements, such as “may,” “include,” and/or “exclude.” The “may” statement describes tasks that workers in an occupation may, but are not required, to perform; while “includes” and “excludes” statements provide more detail on who counts in this occupational category. Finally, many occupations have one or more “illustrative examples,” which are job titles classified in only that occupation.

Data providers can access additional information about the SOC, including links to the SOC Classification Principles and Coding Guidelines, by visiting the IPEDS HR/SOC Information Center available on the IPEDS website. The site includes a number of resources to assist institutions with reporting data using the new occupational categories, including an IPEDS/SOC crosswalk, SOC Browse Tool, frequently asked questions, and the downloadable Direct Match Title File (DMTF) which allows users to compare occupational information for job titles across agencies.

For more information on the material presented in this tutorial, please contact the IPEDS Help Desk.